UNITED
NATIONS

S

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1998/912
3 October 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL PREPARED PURSUANT TO RESOLUTIONS 1160 (1998) AND 1199 (1998) OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998) of 31 March 1998 and 1199 (1998) of 23 September 1998. In its resolution 1160 (1998), the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed on the situation in Kosovo and to provide an assessment on whether the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had complied in a constructive manner with conditions put forward by the Contact Group. In its resolution 1199 (1998), the Council further requested me to provide regular reports to it as necessary on my assessment of compliance with that resolution by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and all elements in the Kosovo Albanian community, including through my regular reports on compliance with resolution 1160 (1998). The present report covers the period since my previous report, dated 4 September 1998, prepared pursuant to resolution 1160 (1998) (S/1998/834).

II. SECURITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 1160 (1998

2. As at 2 October 1998, a total of 51 States, listed in my earlier reports (S/1998/608, S/1998/712 and S/1998/834), as well as Ireland and the Russian Federation, had reported to the Committee established pursuant to paragraph 9 of Security Council resolution 1160 (1998), in accordance with paragraph 12 of that resolution, on the steps they had taken to give effect to the prohibitions imposed by the same resolution. In a note verbale dated 15 September 1998, the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations, on behalf of the European Union, transmitted to the Chairman of the Committee the second special report from the European Community Monitoring Mission containing its observations pertaining to the Albania/Kosovo border.

3. It will be recalled that on 21 July 1998, the Security Council adopted resolution 1186 (1998), by which it mandated the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) to perform tasks of monitoring the border areas and to report to me on illicit arms flows and other activities that are prohibited

under resolution 1160 (1998). In this connection I would like to refer to paragraph 5 of my previous report (S/1998/834) and to inform the Council that I have not yet received any suggestions on the establishment of an integrated coordinating mechanism of which UNPREDEP would form a part.

III. SITUATION IN KOSOVO

4. The present report is based on information regarding the situation on the ground from the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Contact Group and individual Member States. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara A. Otunnu, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, visited the region from 10 to 12 September and from 24 to 29 September respectively and reported to me on their findings. As the present report was being finalized, the Secretariat received a factual report from NATO on the military situation in Kosovo following the adoption of resolution 1199 (1998). The information provided therein is reflected in the report. Reports have also been received from the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission. In addition to other information provided (see annex), the Chairman-in-Office of OSCE indicated to me that, despite a number of approaches, the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had not changed their position vis-à-vis the earlier requests of OSCE, including the acceptance of the mission of Felipe González or prospective OSCE missions, including one in Kosovo.

Hostilities

5. During the reporting period, fighting in Kosovo continued unabated. Government security forces conducted offensives in the various parts of Kosovo, including the areas of Licovac, Glogovac and Cicavica. In the week following the adoption, on 23 September 1998, of resolution 1199 (1998), the forces in fact intensified their operations, launching another offensive in the Drenica region and in the Suva Reka-Stimlje-Urosevac triangle. Those operations have reportedly resulted in the displacement of some 20,000 additional people. Smaller operations were conducted by the Serbian security forces in the Prizren area. Fighting continued on 28 and 29 September, contrary to the statement of the Serbian Prime Minister, Mr. Marjanovic, on 28 September, that anti-insurgency operations in Kosovo had been completed and that peace reigned in Kosovo.

6. Military activity seemed to wind down in the last days of September. There was evidence of heavily armoured formations returning to their barracks. On 29 September, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Zivadin Jovanovic assured me that troops were returning to the places of their permanent location. According to the most recent reports, military forces withdrew from the Drenica and Prizren areas on 1 October and observers indicated a decrease in activities of the security forces. However, the Secretariat is still receiving information that the Government's armed presence remains significant and that the operations of the special police continue.

7. The desperate situation of the civilian population remains the most disturbing aspect of the hostilities in Kosovo. I am particularly concerned that civilians increasingly have become the main target in the conflict. Fighting in Kosovo has resulted in a mass displacement of civilian populations, the extensive destruction of villages and means of livelihood and the deep trauma and despair of displaced populations. Many villages have been destroyed by shelling and burning following operations conducted by federal and Serbian government forces. There are concerns that the disproportionate use of force and actions of the security forces are designed to terrorize and subjugate the population, a collective punishment to teach them that the price of supporting the Kosovo Albanian paramilitary units is too high and will be even higher in future. The Serbian security forces have demanded the surrender of weapons and have been reported to use terror and violence against civilians to force people to flee their homes or the places where they had sought refuge, under the guise of separating them from fighters of the Kosovo Albanian paramilitary units. The tactics include shelling, detentions and threats to life, and finally short-notice demands to leave or face the consequences. There have been disruptions in electricity and other services, and empty dwellings have been burned and looted, abandoned farm vehicles have been destroyed, and farm animals have been burned in their barns or shot in the fields. For example, international observers witnessed Serb troops looting and burning houses in the Suva Reka area on 27 September.

8. The level of destruction points clearly to an indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against civilian populations. As of mid-September, an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 buildings in 269 villages had been severely damaged or destroyed by shelling and deliberate burning in the Serb forces' main areas of operations. Information available to me from reliable sources covered only villages - not cities - in western and central Kosovo. If the rate of destruction observed in the first two weeks of September were to continue, an estimated total of 9,000 homes in nearly 300 settlements would be uninhabitable (without significant reconstruction) by early November.

Human rights

9. I am outraged by reports of mass killings of civilians in Kosovo, which recall the atrocities committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following reports concerning the killing of 20 Kosovo Albanian internally displaced persons in Gornje Obrinje in the central Drenica area on 28 September, a Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission team witnessed at least 14 bodies, some severely mutilated. Most were children and women at ages ranging from 18 months to 95 years. The Serb authorities denied any involvement of the police force in those atrocities. However, further killings of Kosovo civilians were reported, including the alleged summary execution of some 12 to 23 males (accounts vary) in the Golubovac area on 27 September. The Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission conducted a preliminary investigation in the area and observed pools of blood in the dirt, tools presumably used to stab the victims and small-calibre shell casings.

10. While the victims of the conflict are overwhelmingly ethnic Albanians, Kosovo Serbs are suffering as well. There have been a number of reports of the kidnapping and killing of Serbian and Albanian civilians by Kosovo Albanian

paramilitary units. The village of Zocite, which was once half-Serb and half-Kosovo Albanian, now has only 30 Serbs, and 80 per cent of the houses were burned and destroyed during the period of several months when the village was under the control of Kosovo Albanian paramilitary units. Mass graves of Serbs were discovered in Klecka, Glodjane and Ratis. The Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission investigated the latest mass grave in Glodjane. The ambushing of members of the security forces by the Kosovo Albanian paramilitary units has led to reprisals, not only by the Serbian authorities, but also by armed Serb civilians, against the innocent population.

Humanitarian situation

11. The pattern of displacement is fast-changing and unpredictable as people flee in response to the actions and real or perceived threats of the security forces. Even though there have been some returns, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than 200,000 persons remain displaced in Kosovo and some 80,000 are in neighbouring countries and other parts of Serbia. Shifting operations by Serb security forces and the Yugoslav army have continued to uproot new groups of Kosovars and to keep relief efforts off-balance. Although reporting indicated that approximately 30,000 to 50,000 internally displaced persons in Kosovo had recently returned to their homes, the total number of internally displaced persons remains unchanged, offset by the most recent government offensives. International monitors have been told that displaced persons are refusing to return home because of their fear of reprisals, and a number of displaced people have been arrested by the security forces upon returning home.

12. In Albania, while the estimated number of refugees is relatively small (some 20,000), the political and economic impact of their presence is clearly felt. The poor infrastructure and rampant lawlessness in some areas magnify the impact of the arrival of refugees. The harsh winter and insecurity in Bajram Curri led to the closure of the UNHCR office there, where only 2,500 refugees remain. The High Commissioner requested a quick decision on the allocation of land and buildings for collective accommodation in more suitable locations. The internal situation in Albania, however, is likely to delay this allocation and the adoption of legislation on refugees.

13. With 45,000 recent arrivals from Kosovo, Montenegro now has about the same number of displaced persons as at the height of the war in 1993 - some 12 per cent of the population. The High Commissioner for Refugees told President Djukanovic that while the reasons for the closure of the border with Kosovo announced on 11 September were understandable, she urged him to reverse the decision. President Djukanovic gave assurances that the decision would be implemented flexibly, with individual situations considered. He also gave assurances that there would be no more forced returns to Kosovo or expulsions to Albania. The High Commissioner pledged additional support for assistance programmes and noted a positive response to the August 1998 inter-agency appeal for the Kosovo crisis.

14. There are some 7,000 Kosovo Albanian asylum-seekers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the number continues to rise. The Government has finally adopted an instruction on the treatment of asylum-seekers. Finding satisfactory

accommodation is now the main problem, given the already very heavy pressure on housing.

15. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia there are an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Kosovo Albanians whose presence is directly linked to the conflict. Citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia do not need an entry visa for a two-month stay, and the Government has just formally agreed to regularize the status of those who have exceeded this period. Some 500 persons have approached UNHCR and its partners for assistance. A large-scale influx is thought unlikely but cannot be excluded.

16. The Government claims that some 100,000 refugees have returned to their homes (independent estimates are some 30,000 to 50,000) and has pledged to facilitate the process of returns. At present, the authorities have opened 12 centres around Kosovo to provide assistance to internally displaced persons. In some of them, ethnic Albanians are employed. An immediate and fundamental change in the Serbian authorities' approach is, however, essential. Without it, indicators of different stages in the underlying cycle of violence and repression - for example, the end of one offensive, fluctuations in the number of those affected, displaced or without shelter or returnees - will have only short-term significance. The current policy and methods used by the authorities predictably cause large-scale and often repeated displacement and a well-founded fear of mistreatment by the security forces upon return. Many internally displaced persons were reportedly prevented from returning to their homes and were forced to move elsewhere. There are a number of reports of detentions and arrests of able-bodied men, some of whom are still unaccounted for. Such an attitude, combined with information about atrocities committed against civilians, has generated fear among many internally displaced persons, preventing them from returning. Thus, the absence of adequate security remains the main obstacle to return.

17. With only a few weeks before the onset of winter, the issue of the return of displaced persons and refugees remains one of the most pressing issues. Some 50,000 internally displaced persons currently lack shelter or any support network, and are ill-prepared for inclement winter weather that may arrive as early as next month. The priority of any humanitarian strategy should be to assist these people. Children and the elderly will almost certainly risk death from exposure if they remain at their current locations - especially the ones at higher elevations - into the winter.

18. While the major focus is on immediate needs, such as the return of internally displaced persons and the provision of urgent assistance to those still living in the open air, it is also necessary to address broader humanitarian issues. As most of the displaced persons in Kosovo are staying with families, assistance has to be provided to a much broader segment of the population. The host families that support most of them are beginning to deplete their personal food stocks. In this regard, an important element, in addition to providing assistance to local host families, is the removal of an unofficial blockade of Kosovo by the Serbian authorities.

19. The Government has appealed to internally displaced persons, encouraging them to return. However, after six months of hostilities, mere declarations

appear to be insufficient to ensure their return. The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia must be made to assume its full responsibility of guaranteeing security for returnees as well as punishing those responsible for previous abuses and destruction.

20. I welcome the good intentions contained in the conclusions of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, adopted on 28 September, regarding the speedy resolution of all humanitarian problems in Kosovo, including the reconstruction of damaged houses and the adoption of concrete measures for health care as well as the overall normalization of the economy and supply. The National Assembly also indicated that the Government of Serbia would continue to cooperate fully with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNHCR with the basic goal of reducing as much as possible humanitarian problems and eliminating them soon through joint and concerted efforts, and would ensure the ability of humanitarian agencies to work unhindered. I am looking forward to seeing these assurances implemented in the most expeditious and effective way.

21. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees urged President Milosevic to stop the violence against civilians, the destruction and looting of deserted property and the random detention of able-bodied males. She stressed the importance of confidence-building measures such as amnesty, a reduction in the presence of a highly visible and intimidating security force, an end to the de facto commercial blockade imposed in Kosovo and the restoration of essential services. However, even those measures would have little impact without evidence of a real change of heart and approach.

The humanitarian response

22. There has been a significant increase in operational capacity, and coordination is good on the ground. UNHCR has strengthened both this capacity and its presence in order to discharge its lead agency responsibilities effectively. Coordination with UNHCR non-governmental organization partners, with ICRC and with the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission is of particular importance. UNHCR has a full-time liaison officer with the Mission.

23. Coordination with the provincial and local authorities and with representatives of the Kosovo Albanian community is no less important. The High Commissioner for Refugees underlined to President Milosevic that the beneficiaries must have confidence in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and that a key role had to be played by such agencies as the Mother Theresa Society.

24. Although aid agencies have significantly expanded their operations in Kosovo, total requirements are not being met because of the restrictive environment in which aid agencies operate. The security operations have continued to delay relief convoys travelling to populations in need until they have deemed an area "secure", have carried out protracted shelling of targets in close proximity to large groups of internally displaced persons and have displayed extremely heavy-handed behaviour when dealing with displaced persons. While overall freedom of movement for humanitarian agencies and international observers has improved, it does not apply to internally displaced persons or, in

certain cases, to journalists. Moreover, continued fighting and security operations in the area have impeded the access of monitors and the delivery of humanitarian aid. There is an urgent need for non-governmental organizations to be given access and for clearance to be granted for humanitarian supplies. To date, non-governmental organizations have been denied radio clearance, thereby jeopardizing the coordination of life-saving operations and personal security.

25. It has been reported that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has undertaken the systematic deployment of both anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines in the border areas with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the areas of fighting within Kosovo itself, however, there have so far been only isolated reports of the use of anti-personnel landmines. However, a Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission vehicle recently hit a mine, and on 1 October an ICRC vehicle ran into an anti-tank mine in the same area. Since the laying of landmines could become a trend, the early deployment of a United Nations Mine Action Service team could become necessary. It should be given clearance to assess the situation of landmines in conflict areas. This will be fundamental to the return process and will also help to ensure the safe and free movement of humanitarian personnel and international observers.

Political settlement

26. There is a need to create a favourable climate for the process of negotiating a political settlement of the Kosovo crisis. I welcome in this regard the efforts of the international community to bring about a political solution to the problem and support the efforts of the Contact Group, and in particular Ambassador Christopher Hill, to negotiate a political settlement between the Serb authorities and Kosovo Albanian leaders, of whom Dr. Rugova remains the most prominent figure, although his leadership is contested by the Albanian opposition and Kosovar paramilitary units. Following the discussion of the Kosovo issue at the meeting of the Contact Group in London on 2 October, the Chairman communicated to me his conclusions:

> "The Contact Group is united and intends to be united. We expect full and immediate compliance with Security Council resolution 1199. This has not so far been achieved.
>
> "We heard a report on the work of the U.S. facilitator, Ambassador Hill, on the negotiating track. We endorsed a revised paper which will now be put to the parties on behalf of the Contact Group.
>
> "We are united in condemning what is happening on the ground and in support for humanitarian efforts.
>
> "We all concluded that time is running out."

27. I support the Chairman's conclusions and believe that there is no alternative to a direct dialogue in search of a mutually acceptable settlement in the interest of all people of Kosovo and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The consequences of the current repressive approach not only affect the immediate humanitarian situation, they also have a direct and major adverse impact on the prospects for a just and lasting political solution. Even once

there is a fundamentally new approach by Belgrade, the task of correcting the very deep-rooted damage of the last years, and in particular the last months, will be enormous.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

28. In the last few weeks, the international community has witnessed appalling atrocities in Kosovo, reminiscent of the recent past elsewhere in the Balkans. These have been borne out by reporting by the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission and other reliable sources. I reiterate my utter condemnation of such wanton killing and destruction. It is clear beyond any reasonable doubt that the great majority of such acts have been committed by security forces in Kosovo acting under the authority of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. But Kosovar Albanian paramilitary units have engaged in armed action also, and there is good reason to believe that they too have committed atrocities. All those involved in the killing and mistreatment of civilians and in the destruction of property must be brought to justice. There is a need for a thorough investigation, under effective international control or with international participation, of all reported cases of atrocities and violations of human rights.

29. The Security Council has reaffirmed the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have the inherent right, as well as the duty, to maintain public order and security and to respond to violent acts of provocation. However, this can in no way justify the systematic terror inflicted on civilians these past few days and weeks. It is the duty of security forces to give equal protection to all citizens, not to intimidate or murder them. It is equally necessary, as called for by the Security Council, for terrorist action, including the taking of hostages by Kosovar Albanian elements, to cease.

30. If the present state of affairs persists, thousands could die in the winter. In my earlier statements on the situation in Kosovo, I have emphasized this danger repeatedly and appealed to the international community to undertake urgent steps in order to prevent a humanitarian disaster. The possibilities of asylum outside Kosovo are ever more limited, and much of the shelter available clearly is inadequate for winter. Conditions must be created that would allow for the return of a significant number of internally displaced persons. This requires a radical change of policy and behaviour and the introduction of confidence-building measures - such as a withdrawal of police units, a declaration of amnesty and a release of prisoners. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia authorities assert that such steps have already been taken. According to reports from the field, the withdrawal so far appears limited, and it would seem that the fear that led civilians to flee remains. For all internally displaced persons, the first priority is the restoration of security. The Government must restrain police excesses and give police instructions to respect international human rights conventions. Greater efforts are also required to improve access to prisoners taken by the authorities and to secure the release of, or accounting for, hostages taken by the Kosovar Albanian side.

31. It is my earnest hope that the negotiations between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership will be resumed without delay and produce early agreements, and that they will result in the restoration of confidence that is needed for a return and resettlement of all those who have fled their homes in fear. Such agreements might also envisage more far-reaching steps, possibly even institutional reforms, to address long-term needs. If there is to be a role for the international community in assisting in the implementation of such agreements, it will require a proper assessment of needs that would take humanitarian as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction requirements fully into account. The necessary operational planning must be conducted, including an appropriate division of labour, and effective implementation and coordination mechanisms. I would like to express my hope that these considerations will be borne in mind by those involved in the negotiations. It would in my view be useful, in this regard, to initiate consultations amongst international actors to prepare to face such a challenge, without necessarily awaiting the agreements. The United Nations is prepared to play an active role in such consultations.

32. I believe that action is urgently required on several fronts. The violence on all sides has to be brought to a halt. Full humanitarian access must be granted. Conditions need to be created that will enable refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes with confidence that they will not face harassment or worse. It is imperative that the international presence be strengthened and made more effective. In particular, it would be helpful if, in the immediate term, the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission were brought to its full strength and if the presence of human rights observers were enhanced. Also, it will be essential to ensure the closest possible coordination of international efforts in the political, humanitarian and other fields. A broad range of options could be considered in that regard.

33. In the present report, as in previous ones issued pursuant to Security Council resolution 1160 (1998), I have had to rely largely on information and analysis from sources external to the United Nations. I am grateful for these contributions, which carry conviction and are reflected in the body of the report. But, unlike reports to the Council on missions or operations where the United Nations has a direct political presence on the ground, I do not have the means necessary to provide an independent assessment of compliance, as required by the Security Council in paragraph 15 of resolution 1199 (1998), other than on the humanitarian situation. Therefore, the Council may wish to make its own judgement in this respect on the basis of the present report. As the Council has affirmed in its resolution 1199 (1998), the deterioration in the situation in Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, constitutes a threat to peace and security in the region. It is widely recognized in the international community that the humanitarian crisis is a consequence of what is fundamentally a political problem, which requires a comprehensive political solution through a negotiated settlement.

34. While I fully share the sense of indignation and revulsion at what has been happening in Kosovo, the international community must never lose sight of the ultimate need for a comprehensive political solution. Otherwise, we shall be treating only the symptoms of the problem, and not its causes.

Annex

Information on the situation in Kosovo and measures taken by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, submitted pursuant to paragraphs 13 and 16 of Security Council resolution 1160 (1998)

General situation

The period since the previous report (S/1998/834/Add.1) has been characterized by a decrease in military operations after the offensive against armed groups of Kosovo Albanians launched by Serb forces in August.

During the second half of August only limited military actions were observed. However, house-to-house searches were carried out and the number of mine accidents increased. In the first week of September the area of Kosovo bordering north-eastern Albania was relatively calm, but continued fighting was observed towards the south, on the outskirts of Djakovica and in villages nearby. During September Yugoslav forces continued to pound villages to stamp out any traces of resistance, the burning of houses continued in the area south of Prizren and military operations commenced in the area of Orahovac with a starting line at Zrze-Orahovac and moving west.

At the end of August, Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighters admitted that because of serious setbacks and lack of success with previous tactics they would resort to "hit and run" operations. Similar views were presented by Adem Demaci, leader of the Parliamentary Party of Kosovo and recently appointed political representative of the Kosovo Liberation Army. In late August, he stated to the media that the group would now adopt classic guerrilla warfare tactics against Yugoslav targets after losing territory during the recent Serbian offensive.

At the beginning of September, the United States Ambassador to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Peace Envoy, Christopher Hill, announced that an outline agreement had been reached between the Kosovo Albanians and the Belgrade authorities on the future of Kosovo. The agreement, based on options featured in the document of the Contact Group, envisages a three-year stabilization and normalization period to allow for the re-establishment of democratic institutions. It was also agreed that indirect talks should continue, despite the fact that indirect talks had as yet been fruitless.

Still, there is confusion as to just who the Kosovo Albanians making such an agreement represent. Hitherto, there has been little success in the attempts to persuade the Albanian Democratic Movement (LDS), a party created in late June 1998 and led by Mr. Rexhep Qosja, a former ally of Rugova, to join the negotiations. Moreover, the political representative of KLA, Mr. Demaci, sees any temporary agreement as a capitulation and has pledged to continue the fighting. But the fact that some returnees have handed over their weapons to Serb forces is seen as an indication that segments of the Albanian population are prepared to accept whatever interim political agreement is reached.

In this respect there are increasing indications of splits among Albanian fighting groups. With sharp divisions within the Kosovo Albanian ranks, the problem of just who represents them will likely continue and the prospects of a ceasefire called by KLA and the Serbian authorities currently appear remote.

Monitoring activities in Kosovo

The Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission has continued its activity despite the growing aversion on the part of Serb security forces and KLA. The Mission is composed of several tens of people representing European Union (EU) States, the United States of America, the Russian Federation and Canada. Every week there are about 50 to 60 observation trips and a report on the situation is presented and further accepted in Belgrade by the ambassadors of the Contact Group States (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, Italy, Germany, Russian Federation and the United States of America) and Austria (EU Presidency) and Poland (Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)).

Regardless of the missions, Kosovo has been regularly visited by employees of embassies accredited to Belgrade. Also, politicians and diplomats on a visit to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia used to go to Kosovo.

The situation of the civilian population

Fighting has forced more than 200,000 people to flee their homes. The situation is made worse by large-scale destruction of houses, food shortages and the risk of epidemic. The threat of humanitarian catastrophe is becoming ever more real. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), large numbers of displaced persons, as many as 50,000, are today living out in the open in Kosovo. Many others are living in desperate conditions as entire villages have been destroyed, livestock slaughtered and fields burned.

Although great emphasis has been given recently to the return of displaced persons, the return process is hampered by the level of destruction in some villages, and, for those who can return to relatively undamaged areas, the issue of security is paramount. The presence of Serb security forces in many areas continues to create a feeling of insecurity on the part of those wishing to return.

Several cases of large-scale detentions have been reported on different occasions where men of fighting age suspected of being separatist guerrillas were separated from the women, children and elderly by police, backed by armoured vehicles, and taken to places of detention for interrogation.

Analysis of the Kosovo conflict spillover potential

As at 1 September, UNHCR was reporting a total of 14,000 refugees in Albania of which 7,000 remained in the Tropoja district, the rest having left for other parts of the country. Still, reliable statistics are difficult to compile owing to the fluid nature of the situation. According to Albanian sources there are about 7,500 registered refugees in the Bajram Curri area and

7,500 in central Albania, particularly in the Durrës area. Out of a total of 15,000 persons (6,100 families), about 1,000 live in accommodations provided by the Government and the rest live with ordinary families.

The relative decrease in incoming refugees during the summer in the Tropoja and Has districts was caused by the tightening of the border by Yugoslav forces: the creation of a cordon sanitaire along the border west of Djakovica (Dečane-Ponoševac-Djakovica road and Dečane-Skrivljan-Djakovica road), heavier controls by the Yugoslav authorities on the routes over the mountains and the laying of mines. The need for refugees to find more arduous routes through this area in order to avoid detection resulted in many refugees trying to enter Albania through Montenegro. It was estimated that, by the end of August, approximately 100 to 120 refugees a day were entering the Shkodčr-Koplik area through Montenegro. During the first two weeks of September, the number of refugees crossing into Albania increased steadily, indicating an opening of safe corridors through the border.

The readiness of the local population to accommodate a vast majority of the refugees, mainly elderly people, women and children, largely facilitated the immediate handling of the major influx. However, it put further strain on the local Albanian population already living under difficult or even harsh economic and social conditions. Evidence suggests that the absorption capacities are exhausted. This underlines the importance of establishing appropriate shelter facilities, preferably in other parts of Albania, in order to alleviate current and potential needs before the winter.

In this respect, in the first week of September, the Kosovo refugee issue was discussed in the Albanian Parliament, and the respective parliamentary commissions severely criticized the Government for failing to take measures to accommodate the refugees from Kosovo, particularly with winter approaching.

According to the latest figures, the number of refugees in Montenegro (640,000 inhabitants) exceeds 45,000, which have to be added to the 30,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The Podgorica authorities have begun the organized transport of about 3,000 refugees from Kosovo to Albania across the unofficial Vrmos border crossing some three kilometres from Plav (south-east of Montenegro).

Numerous incidents between KLA units and the Yugoslav army and Serb police have been reported in the border areas. Many attempts have been recorded of the illegal crossing of the border by armed Albanians. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Albania have accused one another of causing incidents on the border and of shooting in the other State's territory.

Measures taken by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

On 18 August 1998, in a letter addressed to the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Mr. Jovanovic, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Duve, expressed his concerns over lack of access for foreign journalists intending to cover events in Yugoslavia in a number of instances, considered as serious incidents and not consistent with OSCE principles and commitments. On 27 August, Mr. Duve addressed the Permanent

Council of OSCE, recalling the letters sent to the Yugoslav Foreign Minister and urging the Belgrade authorities to allow unimpeded access to the media to cover the events in the country, especially in Kosovo.

On 3 September 1998, Ambassador Hill addressed the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna and assessed the current situation in the region, elaborating on the prospects for a negotiated settlement to the crisis in Kosovo. He made it very clear that violence must stop and that there can only be a peaceful solution to the problems of Kosovo, but emphasizing also that the search for political solutions should not be conditioned by the continued violence and that pursuing diplomatic action cannot wait until a ceasefire is called.

On the political negotiations, Ambassador Hill informed the Permanent Council that a new Albanian negotiating team composed of moderate and more radical Albanian participants had reached an agreement based on options featured in the document of the Contact Group. The agreement envisages a three-year stabilization and normalization period to allow for the re-establishment of democratic institutions, and after this period new approaches could be envisaged. He stressed the crucial importance of the international presence in Kosovo during the implementation period and the important role OSCE had to play in the area.

In her address to the Permanent Council on the same day, United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright elaborated on the same issue, stating that she foresaw a special role for OSCE in a possible negotiated settlement of the Kosovo conflict, especially with regard to elections.

In its continued efforts to monitor the situation on the borders of Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, on 10 September the OSCE Permanent Council approved supplementary budgets for the continued enhancement of the OSCE presence in Albania and the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje.